

Leafy Greens



Your Grandmother Was Right

Most of us know we should eat leafy green vegetables but do most of us know why? Dark greens are important because they are good sources of essential nutrients including iron, calcium, Vitamins A, K and C, fiber, potassium and folate. Spinach, broccoli, escarole, collards, bok choy, kale, turnip greens, arugula, mustard greens, watercress, broccoli rabe, beet greens, cabbage and dark green leafy lettuces are the most commonly consumed greens in this country, though some are more familiar than others in certain regions. Cooking greens still leaves a nutritionally potent product – this is significant because many greens are either in frozen or canned form or require cooking for optimal palatability. Smaller leaves indicate a more immature plant which means the greens may require little or no cooking and they will taste milder and more delicate. Larger, thicker-leaved greens require a little more care but will usually have a more robust flavor.

No Brainer

Recent reports have shown that people who eat 3 servings of vegetables, particularly the dark green leafy types which are rich in folate, had brains that functioned as if they were five years younger. Leafy greens have also been shown to improve visual performance and may prevent age-related eye diseases – these foods, especially kale and spinach, contain lutein and zeaxanthin. Because leafy greens are high in Vitamin K, patients on anti-coagulant medications, such as Coumadin, need to monitor their intake. It is important to follow basic food safety and sanitation habits when handling greens - wash your hands, clean the greens under running water just before eating, keep work surfaces clean and store them in the refrigerator.

Go Green

The amount of vegetables you need depends on your age, sex, and level of activity. Recommended daily amounts range from 1 cup (for children) to 3 cups (for men). For the dark green sub group of vegetables, 1-3 cups per week is recommended. In general, 1 cup of raw or cooked vegetables or 2 cups of raw leafy greens can be considered 1 cup from the vegetable group. Many studies have shown that diets rich in vegetables can reduce the risk of chronic disease. On the other hand, evidence supporting high doses of individual nutrients or phytonutrients has been relatively weak and inconsistent. Vegetables contain thousands of biologically active chemicals that are likely to interact to promote health. And one of the best ways to take advantage of this is to eat your greens!



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